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Misty Fiords

National Monument

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Misty Fiords National Monument



Fiords! Glaciers! Mountains! Wildlife and fish! These are some of the outstanding scenic, scientific, and historical features of Misty Fiords National Monument in southeast Alaska.

Behm Canal, a deep, long, narrow inlet of the northeastern Pacific Ocean, leads to the heart of the national monument, which is within the Tongass National Forest. Walker Cove and Rudyerd Bay may be the most picturesque areas. They are surrounded by rock walls jutting 3,000 feet (900 meters) from the ocean.

Three major rivers and hundreds of small streams are fed by more than 150 inches (381 centimeters) of misty rain and snow each year, as well as by meltwater from large icefields and glaciers that begin near the border of Canada. Mineral springs and volcanic lava flows add to the unique geological features of the area. Veins of gold, silver, copper, and other minerals may be found in the mountains that rise as high as Mount John Jay, which is 7,499 feet (2,279 meters) in elevation.

The rugged terrain of Misty Fiords National Monument supports many nearly untouched coastal ecosystems and covers about 3,570 square miles (9,246 square kilometers). Sitka spruce, western hemlock, and cedar trees thrive in the moist climate. Alder, devilsclub, and dense underbrush grow in places as high as timberline at about 2,000 feet (610 meters) above sea level. Open muskegs and alpine meadows are nestled in mountain valleys.

Most kinds of wildlife and fish common to southeast Alaska live in Misty Fiords. Bald eagles, featured on America's national emblem, are striking in flight. Many eagles nest in large trees near rivers and shorelines where pairs share the raising of young during summer. Bald eagles are protected by Federal and State laws.

Alaska's famous brown bears, black bears, Sitka black-tailed deer, wolves, and mountain goats are the most common large mammals in Misty Fiords. Beavers, mink, marten, foxes, and river otters are common small animals. Freshwater trout and five kinds of salmon are the most common fish. In Behm Canal and nearby ocean waters, porpoises, whales, sea lions, and seals are sometimes sighted.



Visitors enjoy many kinds of primitive, unconfined recreational activities. Favored attractions include picturetaking, birdwatching, backpacking, beachcamping, picnicking, crabbing, exploring, kayaking, and canoeing. Hunting and fishing are regulated by the State of Alaska. Rustic cabins may be reserved from the USDA Forest Service for a nominal daily fee.

Misty Fiords National Monument is remote and wild. Medical facilities are distant. Visitors should observe several safety precautions, because they must rely mainly on their own resources in emergencies. Some use services of guides familiar with the area. Every expedition should carry at least an emergency food supply, first aid kit, shelter, adequate clothing, and raingear.

An extra word of caution: Misty Fiords is inhabited by hundreds of bears that become unpredictable when disturbed. To avoid unexpected encounters with bears, many people use noisemakers, especially along rivers and trails where bears eat. Experienced campers sleep well away from cooking areas and keep their food supplies out of bears' reach. Rifles of at least 30-06 caliber may be carried for protection.



Few marks of human activity are found in Misty Fiords. The first human inhabitants may have settled in the area as early as 10,000 years ago. Evidence of Tlingit and Haida Indian societies and of early American occupation may be found in a few places. Many are of religious or mythological significance. Federal laws prohibit disturbance of any of these features.

Misty Fiords National Monument may be reached by water or air. No permanent roads exist. In summer, cruiseships and charter boats often sail through the deep waters of the Behm Canal.

Floatplanes provide the quickest access to Misty Fiords. Charter air services are available in Ketchikan, Wrangell, Petersburg, Juneau, Haines, Skagway, or Sitka, which are all adjacent to the Tongass National Forest. Ketchikan is the closest city with frequent commercial jet service. It is about 680 miles (1,100 kilometers) by air from Seattle and 770 miles (1,240 kilometers) from Anchorage.

For visitors from the south, Misty Fiords National Monument is the first of Alaska's 18 national monuments. With its spectacular sea cliffs, bald eagles, bears, and evergreen trees, Misty Fiords is one of America's outstanding scenic wonders.



For more information, write to —

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